New York Times gives advice about food trucks and restaurants build food trucks to enlarge their “brands,” do those street foods really democratize? Despite the difficulty of identifying a more ecologically sound food realm, Haden, Heldke and Strong issue an important call in Educated Tastes for some other way of drawing taste’s boundaries.

References


TAKING FOOD PUBLIC: REDEFINING FOODWAYS IN A CHANGING WORLD


Reviewed by Amy Zader, University of Colorado

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This reader provides a thoroughly researched and comprehensive look at current discussions in food studies. Drawing from rich cases that highlight the intricate and complex relationships between food and society, the collection challenges readers to consider the diverse ways through which food enters and shapes social relationships. The theme—taking food public—illustrates the ways that food has left the home and entered the public sphere of social life. While food has always played an essential role in defining social and cultural connections, experiences of food products have become highly contested in recent years. Consumers express increased concern over matters including nutrition, ingredients, global footprint and commercial production. In the editors’ words, taking food public “means that well beyond the academy people across the globe are consciously shaping food in the public sphere, contesting the status quo, and promoting creative options” (p. 1). Indeed, this volume of forty-three chapters addresses the changing ways that food has become a political and negotiated aspect of our everyday lives.
Psyche Williams-Forsom, Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Maryland-Baltimore has partnered with Carole Counihan, co-editor of Food and Culture (2008) and editor-in-chief of the Food and Foodways journal, to bring important public debates about food into conversation with one another. The five sections of the book provide detailed, thought-provoking discussions on topics surrounding food and everyday life, including gender, governance, class, activism, race, migration, access and availability, democracy, capitalism and food deserts. These include: rethinking production, rethinking food consumption, performing food cultures, food diasporas—taking food global, and food activism.

Perhaps the most pervasive theme that ties the chapters together is social justice. Food holds a unique position in our daily lives; it can be a lens through which we view and understand broader social issues. Whether discussing food accessibility, insecurity or disparities, most chapters address struggles in the everyday lives of people to obtain, access and enjoy food they desire. The issues raised include adequate access to nutritious food in various developing countries (Garth, Chapter 5; Schroeder, Chapter 37), food access in households with disabled family members (Webber et al., Chapter 10; Lance, Chapter 22), fair trade in the global economy (Reichman, Chapter 25), and creating the space for farmers’ markets in low-income neighborhoods (Markowitz, Chapter 39). Other topics address inequality issues subtly by exploring waste and scarcity in capitalist societies, applying critical racial and feminist frameworks to food and discussing externalities of the global industrial food system.

Throughout the collection, readers are exposed to a wide variety of international culinary customs as well as the opportunities and challenges that it takes to maintain these customs in an era of globalization. Readers are introduced to tequila (Gaytan, Chapter 32), public kitchens (Abarca, Chapter 8) and the GM corn debate in Mexico (Fitting, Chapter 33). While these international studies are heavily weighted on Latin American work, there are other chapters exploring food and tourism in the UK (Sims, Chapter 35), gender in African American and Ghanian households and kitchens (Williams-Forsom, Chapter 11), Chinese vegetable markets in New York City (Imbruce, Chapter 26), and Spam in the Philippines (Matejowsky, Chapter 27). There are also accounts of people around the world coming together around food; one provocative example is a chapter on competitors in international eating contests (Johnson, Chapter 20). Along with these international cases, there are plenty of interesting stories in the United States, such as back-to-the-landers in Oregon (Gross, Chapter 6), “color-blind” attitudes of alternative food managers in California (Guthman, Chapter 15), and the ways people with celiac disease cope with facing a strict diet in public (Copelton, Chapter 41).

In addition to globalization, people’s relationships with food are changing as a result of new media and communication technologies. Looking at how social media has changed the ways we access food, one chapter offers the case of mobile food vendors in New York City who use Twitter to update and advertise their location (Caldwell, Chapter 23). Social media also allows for foodways to be more visible than ever before, as people can create food blogs by updating a blog with pictures of what they eat around the world (Salazar, Chapter 24). Finally, in a visual
manifestation of changing foodways (Chapter 36). Counihan uses a photo essay to address Hispanic women in southern Colorado who use food practices politically and in the public sphere.

Together, the chapters in this book offer innovative and thought-provoking views about food that are accessible to a wide audience. Combining works by well-established scholars and new researchers alike, this compilation provides a multi-disciplinary approach to food studies. Taking Food Public is arranged as a key text for food studies courses as well as more in-depth courses such as food activism, the global food system, food and inequality, and food and society. It is designed for upper-division undergraduates and graduate students with an interest in food systems and the culture of food. The publisher includes a companion website for the book as well as a list of comprehensive test items for instructors. One aspect that was touched upon, but not explicitly addressed in this book is the relationship between food and the environment. Indeed, many activists’ concerns with environmental issues have made their way to issues surrounding the production and consumption of food. Although this topic may very well lie outside the scope of this project, it could be better incorporated in some of the sections so as not to maintain the distance between food studies and environmental concerns.

By demonstrating how food is an issue of general concern, this volume succeeds in making the case that the study of food should be a mainstream academic subject. Authors from backgrounds as diverse as statistics, sustainable agriculture and communications discuss the cultural aspects of society’s changing relationship with food. Taking Food Public is a very useful text for classes engaging in the study of food. The book’s comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to food is appropriate for anyone with a general interest in food or anyone that seeks to enter academic debates surrounding food. As with any reader or collection, depth of research is sacrificed for breadth of scope. Keeping with the theme of taking food public, this volume successfully brings food out of the academy and out of the home. Indeed, as food becomes public, consumers all become activists in the choices we make.

Reference


THE TABLE COMES FIRST
BY ADAM GOPNIK (NEW YORK AND TORONTO: KNOFF, 2011).

Reviewed by Joshua Davidson, Concordia University

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Acclaimed essayist Adam Gopnik is well known for tackling a diversity of topics, from literature to Lincoln to parenting. A lifelong gourmand who has tasted his way